



Testimony in Opposition of HB 5170
An Act Concerning Students' Right to Privacy in their Mobile Electronic Devices
Erin Williamson, LCSW, MPA, Survivor Care Program Director
Education Committee, February 26th, 2018

Distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Erin Williamson, and I have the privilege of serving as the Survivor Care Program Director at Love146, an international anti-trafficking agency. Since joining Love146 in 2014, I have led the development, implementation, and operation of Love146's Connecticut Survivor Care Program, which has provided direct services to over 300 youth who are suspected and confirmed victims of child sex trafficking.

Students' mobile devices serve a variety of functions. In addition to assisting with classroom assignments, students maintain a significant amount of personal information and communication on their mobile devices – including protected health information. Youth engage in trusted private communication with a variety of sources, including peers, caregivers, and service providers, and it is our belief that a violation of school policy does not meet the threshold necessary to violate their right to privacy. As a service provider that regularly communicates with and provides services to youth via text message, we feel strongly that it is vital to protect students' Fourth Amendment rights. Communication between the youth we serve and our licensed social workers is currently protected under section 52-146q of the Connecticut General Statutes. However, this bill would enable school personnel to potentially have access to these records without any authorization signed by their legal guardian.

There must be a way to ensure that educational policies are not violated without eroding students' right to privacy. We require law enforcement to obtain a warrant before searching a suspect's electronic device and legal guardians to provide authorization before clients' records are accessed and shared. Therefore, it would stand that school administrators should not be able to search mobile devices and have access to personal information simply because there is concern that a student violated a school policy. If there is concern that a student poses imminent risk, school administrators should immediately contact law enforcement to investigate.

Love146 hopes that the Committee will see the importance of protecting the privacy of our children and join us in opposing HB 5170. Thank you for your time and consideration.